



Oak Savanna bike trail. Photo by Samuel A. Love via Flickr.

Chapter VI:
Implementation

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Pathway to Success

Creation and adoption of the Comprehensive Regional Plan in many ways represent only the first steps in the planning process. Without active engagement in the pursuit of plan recommendations, the plan will have little lasting effect. A range of CRP policies, recommendations and action items has been developed as part of each chapter of the CRP. This chapter combines the key recommendations and actions that are essential to the success of the Comprehensive Regional Plan implementation.

NIRPC serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Federal law provides for the development of transportation plans by regional Metropolitan Planning Organizations serving urbanized areas with a population of 50,000 or more. The MPO role, combined with other NIRPC actions, supports a comprehensive strategy to implement regional land use plans linked with transportation actions. NIRPC also provides important environmental services necessary for meeting state and federal guidelines for environmental quality, including surface and groundwater quality and clean air requirements.

NIRPC is also a Council of Governments (COG) composed of 41 municipalities, two townships and three county governments of Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties in Northwest Indiana. Unlike its constituent local governments, NIRPC is not a self-governing local unit of government. It lacks land use regulatory police power, and does not have the authority to control development, including zoning or land development regulations. NIRPC does have authority to develop regional policies, direct transportation investments and facilitate the implementation efforts of its member local governments. As a COG, it provides a unique forum for bringing together local officials throughout the region to identify, discuss and address common issues.

The CRP is new ground for NIRPC. The impetus to take a comprehensive approach to land use and transportation planning, in part, grew out of public comments made during the 2030 Transportation Plan development process. This is the first time NIRPC has made a broad policy commitment to a regional role in land use, economic development, environmental and transportation planning and implementation. While discussed in more detail in the introduction of the plan, NIRPC's consideration of land use is supported by federal policy direction on sustainability and livability. To that extent, while there are many ways in which NIRPC can engage in advancing efficient land use and transportation development, it should focus on the critical priorities of the region. This chapter identifies those critical priorities and the pathway to success.



Ringin' in spring run in Valparaiso. Photo courtesy of the Times of Northwest Indiana.

The Role of NIRPC in the CRP

To be effective, NIRPC must focus its limited resources in a manner that best leverages CRP program progress. Fundamentally, NIRPC must continue to build regional coalitions with its constituency and stakeholders toward successful plan implementation. To accomplish this, there are four program areas NIRPC will continue to address and focus on:

1. **Policy Stewardship** – NIRPC will continue to monitor, develop and support actions that advance interests of the CRP. Stewardship includes:
 - *Major Issue/Technical Support* – NIRPC will continue to provide its constituency with professional and technical assistance on issues of regional concern. Historically, this has focused on transportation and environmental activities. While these will continue to be important, NIRPC also will become more involved in land use and economic development to realize the physical development vision of the CRP. NIRPC can serve an important role in reviewing and/or supporting local land use and transportation planning alternatives to help them serve regional goals. Responding to the needs and interests of local governments, NIRPC will be available to assist in coordinating planning initiatives that span municipal and county boundaries and stakeholder interests.
 - *Legislative Initiatives* – The CRP sets forth a range of local, regional, state and federal initiatives that will need to be supported over the next 25 or more years. Initiatives include both intergovernmental as well as legislative needs to create authorities and funding mechanisms for the benefit of implementation.
 - *Council of Government (COG) Role* – NIRPC and the CRP support the expanded use of NIRPC’s forum for identification and discussion of policy issues and action in the interests of Northwest Indiana. The Commission develops its own agenda for collaboration to improve the quality of life in Northwest Indiana. It should empower the region’s elected officials to act with one voice.

2. **Funding and Finance** – NIRPC has served the region well in the past in securing resources for transportation, community facilities and environmental management. Working with its partners and stakeholders, NIRPC will focus on developing even more resources for CRP implementation.
3. **Education and Awareness** – NIRPC will develop new training and education programming to inform its constituency of NIRPC initiatives and regional issues. Community planning and development training also has been identified as a role NIRPC could help fulfill. Regular contact and communication with its constituency is essential to building commitment to NIRPC programs as a regional community.
4. **Local Assistance Program** – Many implementation actions identified in the CRP fundamentally represent local assistance projects. Supporting and facilitating local community planning, identifying best practices and relating CRP policies to local development decisions will be an important component of plan implementation. These activities are new for NIRPC and will require staffing and program development to be an integral component of its overall work program.



Spectators at the Gary South Shore Air Show. Photo courtesy of the Times of Northwest Indiana.

Managing Implementation

Implementation of the CRP is complex. Furthermore, the number, type and priority of implementation actions identified in the CRP will change and evolve over time. In some ways, the means by which implementation is monitored and managed in the years ahead is more important than the specific actions identified at this time. NIRPC will ascertain barriers to implementation, discover and promote best practices, host workshops and provide staff support and assistance. While the staff and NIRPC's committees will have responsibility for implementation, there are two other key activities required to ensure implementation is successful.

- **Comprehensive Regional Plan Implementation Committee** – This will be a new standing committee of NIRPC that will help support the staff, regional stakeholders and other agencies of interest in CRP implementation activities. The committee will serve as a conduit to the region in helping to identify, organize, prioritize, target and support specific actions and recommendations of the plan. The committee and its duties will be determined by the NIRPC Board. It is intended that the CRP Implementation Committee include broad-based interests within the region. It is also intended that this committee not function in a policy role, but rather a technical role in CRP implementation and monitoring of progress.

A Core Communities Committee will be a subcommittee of the Implementation Committee. This group will be formed by representative interests to include, at a minimum, Gary, Hammond, East Chicago and Michigan City. The Core Communities Committee will focus on advancing those recommendations of the CRP intended to realize revitalization of the region's historic central cities. To this end, coordination with the Regional Development Authority and the initiatives included as part of the Marquette Plan are essential core community revitalization efforts.

- **Performance Measures** – Each major element of the CRP has identified performance measures to monitor the progress of implementation. The use of performance measures is necessary for transparency and accountability in plan implementation activities. They provide the means to show progress and impact of plan implementation. The CRP Implementation Committee will be responsible for implementing CRP performance measures.

Implementation Action Plan

The CRP has identified a wide-range of implementation actions. The degree of complexity, difficulty, timeframe and cost of implementation of these actions vary significantly. NIRPC staff, working in concert with the NIRPC Board, will develop a five- and 10-year implementation plan that prioritizes actions within a constrained funding plan. This approach is necessary to realistically assess and identify the commitments NIRPC and its partners can make toward implementation of the plan.

Below are listed key action items from each of the major plan elements. They have been divided into two categories: NIRPC actions and Regional Partnership. Given the intergovernmental nature of the planning program, many actions, while working in concert with NIRPC, will be led by other partner agencies. A preliminary identification of regional partner “champions” that will lead these tasks will be developed in combination with the five- and 10-year implementation plan discussed above.



Business sign in Hammond. Photo by Chicago Geek via Flickr.

Livable Centers, Infill Development & Rural Areas

NIRPC actions:

1. Participate, review and comment on local community and comprehensive plans and updates in relation to the goals of the CRP. Encourage communities to involve NIRPC through participation on local committees.
2. Enhance the public-involvement process, strengthen community-based partnerships, and provide minority and low-income populations with opportunities to learn about and improve the quality and usefulness of transportation in their lives
3. Make regional allocation decisions with regard to environmental justice. Improve data collection, monitoring, and analysis tools that assess the needs of, and analyze the potential impacts on minority populations and low-income populations..
4. Provide technical assistance to revise codes and develop standards/guidelines, reviewing proposed amendments and new codes prior to community or county adoption
5. Maintain and distribute “best practices” information, including local successes, and where possible local examples of livable centers, core revitalization and appropriate rural development
6. Develop “model” code and regulatory guidance to address the following:
 - Promoting housing choice and affordability in livable centers
 - Promoting transit-oriented development in livable centers
 - Promoting complete streets policies in livable centers
 - Sustainable and “green” development practices in urbanized areas
 - Conservation development standards
 - Procedures for plan review of unincorporated unplatted development



Neighborhood sidewalk in Hammond. Photo by Jesse Budlong via Flickr.



Old Lake County Courthouse through restaurant window. Photo by J. Stephen Conn via Flickr.

7. Pursue Livable Centers Planning Grant Program – Funding support for land use planning efforts for Livable Centers and along their linking corridors, which align with regional transportation initiatives (see “Integrated Transportation Initiatives” section)
8. Establish a funding mechanism such as the Creating Livable Communities (CLC) program proposed by NIRPC to help implementing variety of transportation-related land use projects. Once the program is in place, federal formula funding using portions of the current NIRPC transportation formula funds [STP, CMAQ, Transportation Enhancement (TE), etc.], with the corresponding local share could be used for planning and implementing capital projects such as:
 - Streetscape improvements, transit center links, pedestrian linkages, station area plans including high speed station area
 - Access management
 - A model transit-oriented development (TOD) ordinance, or
 - Redevelopment of urban livable centers to support transit facilities and transit corridor plans
9. Work with counties and adjacent municipalities in developing “rural area plans” in locations experiencing development pressure and related infrastructure issues (with counties and adjacent municipalities)
10. Provide guidance on brownfields and greyfields
11. Assist communities in identifying financial resources and aid in navigating grants

Regional Partnership:

1. To the extent possible, align local land use regulations with the 2040 CRP to support Livable Centers, focused revitalization in the core communities and other sustainable development patterns (municipalities)
2. To the extent possible, align and make uniform, county land use regulations with the 2040 CRP to support sustainable development patterns and continued local farming, to include (counties):
 - Establishment of agricultural districts, review of unincorporated residential plans or other development proposals
 - Requirement of appropriate buffers adjacent to active agricultural uses
 - Development of incentives to encourage cluster developments that maintain agriculture and habitat areas
3. Pursue an aggressive brownfield remediation strategy (RDA, the Northwest Forum and others)
 - Encourage voluntary remediation
 - Target core communities and other infill sites
4. Establish incentives to support livable centers and brownfield remediation (counties, state)
5. Establish incentives to support continued agricultural uses (counties, state)

Green Infrastructure & the Environment

NIRPC actions:

1. Encourage, review and comment on proposed open space acquisitions and water trail development, in particular as they relate to the Greenway Infrastructure Network
2. Maximize all opportunities to protect the environment in the transportation program
3. Provide technical assistance to revise codes and develop standards/guidelines
4. Maintain “best practices” information, including local successful examples of open space protection, economic benefit, private sector “green” development and “green” municipal practices (hybrid fleet vehicles, natural de-icing agents, etc.)
5. Develop “model” code and development regulation concepts to address the following:
 - Maintaining and protecting natural features during site development
 - Reducing impervious surfaces and stormwater run-off impacts
 - Restricting development that would impact high-quality waterways, floodplains, etc.
 - Maintaining appropriate buffers at wetlands, riparian areas, etc.
 - Preserve trees
 - Facilitating use of alternative energy sources, such as wind, solar, geothermal, etc.
 - Encouraging water conservation, such as “green” elements to incorporate, incentives to offer, etc.
6. Implement the Greenways & Blueways Plan, in particular improving north-south mobility and linking the trail network to local parks and recreation facilities
7. Engage in watershed scale planning initiatives, in particular for the watersheds that do not yet have a watershed management plan in place, including:
 - Continue multistate planning efforts with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
 - Support communities in educating and providing technical support to the public and decision makers to implement the post construction development practices required in their municipal stormwater permits to protect water quality
 - Support communities in educating and providing technical support for implementation of the erosion control practices required in their municipal stormwater permits to protect water quality
 - Pursue wetland priorities per the Indiana Wetland Conservation Plan
 - Support communities in educating and providing technical support to the public and decision makers for implementation of the water conservation strategies required in their municipal stormwater permits
 - Promote and encourage community utilities to conduct water and wastewater system audits
 - Provide technical assistance to communities/groups interested in developing watershed management plans, for example data, mapping, project coordination
 - Provide easy access to environmental data including GIS layers and mapping on NIRPC website
 - Maintain and update Northwest Indiana Watershed Framework document
8. Track, to the extent possible, local codes and regulations for compatibility with the 2040 CRP to support the Green Infrastructure Network in both land use pattern and site development practices.

9. Maintain and update the Green Infrastructure Network map and encourage partners to assist with updates.
10. Consider the benefits and burdens of potential decisions on environmental justice communities.

Regional Partnership:

1. Align and seek, to the extent possible, compatibility in county land use regulations with the 2040 CRP to limit isolated and inefficient development and ensure open space preservation (counties)
2. Pursue coordinated open space acquisition to expand the Green Infrastructure Network according to 2040 CRP priorities
3. Facilitate effective management and maintenance of privately held open space assets that are critical to the overall Green Infrastructure Network for regional biodiversity and habitat connectivity, including connections through active agricultural areas
4. Promote and educate the public and decision makers in the nine remaining combined sewer overflows (CSO) communities to incorporate green infrastructure into their required Long-Term Control Plans (state)
5. Work with industrial users to identify successful sustainability innovations that can be shared and replicated throughout the region
6. Support local and regional strategies to reduce solid waste, increase recycling and dispose of household hazardous waste
7. Establish incentives and/or a differential assessment structure to support permanent land conservation efforts (counties, state)
8. Work with elected officials, county health departments and ISDH to implement septic system operation and maintenance program across region

9. Work with local governments and nonprofit/advocacy groups to fill in gaps for watershed management coverage
10. Work with partners to increase capacity for watershed management including but not limited to staffing, secure funding, data gathering and analysis
11. Support academic institutions in long-term monitoring programs for habitat and water quality
12. Other partners include the:
 - Local governments
 - Private property owners
 - Corporate property owners
 - Land trust/advocacy groups
 - Linear corridor owners
 - Land developers
 - Federal & state agencies
 - Institutions of education



Seed collection at Ivanhoe Dune & Swale in Lake County.
Photo courtesy EPA.

Economic & Work Force Development

NIRPC actions:

1. Work closely with regional partners such as the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority (RDA) and the Northwest Indiana Economic Development District (NWI EDD) to ensure that NIRPC's technical assistance capacities and distribution of transportation funds align closely with other regional initiatives and to maximize the economic development impacts of:
 - NWI EDD's requests and subsequent distribution of EDA funds
 - Regional high school and higher education initiatives related to the five identified "industry clusters" and emerging "green economy" jobs
 - Hospitals, universities, casinos and other major employers
 - Entrepreneurial business incubators, such as the Regional Entrepreneurial Action Plan (REAP)
 - Certified technology
2. Effective regional marketing will support economic development opportunities by creating a regional identity and "brand" for the Northwest Indiana coastal area, and helping visitors find the recreation opportunities they are seeking. Coordinating marketing efforts and establishing consistency in branding will help create a sense of regional unity and establish the region as a destination.

Regional Partnership:

1. Secure an ongoing and stable funding source for RDA expansion and public transportation investment (public and private support).
2. Pursue the "catalytic" projects identified in the Marquette Plan: A Vision for Lakeshore Reinvestment (RDA), and the Gary and Region Implementation Project (GRIP).
3. Pursue land assembly and site preparation efforts that facilitate Livable Centers, in coordination with brownfield remediation efforts and focused on core communities (the Northwest Indiana Forum and Local Economic Development Organizations).
4. Align ongoing Gary/Chicago International Airport and high speed rail planning initiatives with the core community revitalization goals of the 2040 CRP (RDA, NWIEDD, Gary/Chicago International Airport Authority).
5. Provide cutting-edge utilities and services (broadband fiber optics, etc.) that serve the needs of existing and new businesses, in particular in Livable Centers and the core communities, while also benefiting area residents (Northwest Indiana Forum).



Region employee working in an office. Photo courtesy of the Times of Northwest Indiana.

Integrated Transportation Initiatives

NIRPC actions:

1. Work with regional partners to identify long-term and sustainable financial resources for the region's transit needs
2. Work with the region's counties to conduct rural corridor studies for coordinated land use and transportation improvements
3. Fund transportation improvements that also provide environmental and economic development benefits, per the project selection criteria developed for the 2040 long-range transportation plan, placing transit and roads on a more equal footing for future investment
4. Implement the Ped and Pedal Plan, specifically routes identified in the Priority Regional Trails & Corridors map, as well as policies for improved pedestrian and bicycle access and safety
5. Provide assistance and direction to local governments on implementation of NIRPC's Complete Streets policy and guidelines
6. Provide assistance and direction for implementing corridor studies
7. Livable Centers Planning Grant Program – Funding support for planning studies that lay the groundwork for future implementation of transportation investments that strengthen multimodal access and walkability in designated Livable Centers and for preparing plans and designs in support of 2040 CRP goals, including transit oriented development plans and ordinances. Projects would be sponsored by a local government, transit agency or transit management district, funded through NIRPC's STP program, and intended to also support economic development and improve environmental quality.
8. Sustainable Transportation Grant Program – Funding support for implementation of transportation system improvements that strengthen multimodal access and walkability, in support of 2040 CRP goals. Projects would be sponsored by a local government, transit agency or transit management district, funded through NIRPC's CMAQ program, and intended to also support economic development and improve environmental quality.
9. Provide freight transportation data and freight-related best management practices to local governments. Coordinate with private-sector freight stakeholders
10. Consider the benefits and burdens of potential decisions on environmental justice communities
11. Provide minority and low-income populations with opportunities to learn about and improve the quality and usefulness of transportation in their lives



Freight train in Whiting. Photo by Stephen Sostaric.

Regional Partnership:

1. Develop a sustainable regional bus and paratransit system that can be expanded over time, securing Regional Bus Authority or its successor agency's future viability
2. Develop a public transportation system that is desirable for “choice” riders who might otherwise choose to travel by car – with a focus on passenger comfort, convenience and safety (RDA, transit operators)
3. Seek to improve air quality in the region through regional partners, including at a minimum (South Shore Clean Cities):
 - Converting municipal fleets to hybrid or electric vehicle technology
 - Supporting and expanding public transportation
 - Congestion management/reduction
 - Advancing nonmotorized alternatives
4. Study the feasibility of roadway congestion management strategies for both passenger and freight traffic on the interstate and highway system:
 - Variable pricing on east-west routes through the region, including the Borman Expressway
5. Pursue several important transportation investment initiatives that can positively impact both the business climate and quality of life of the region:
 - Gary/Chicago International Airport, as a regional development “cornerstone,” with expanded freight and logistics opportunities; implement the three-phase CIP to support economic development efforts
 - High Speed Rail, including a station in the Gary/Chicago International Airport
 - Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD) transit-oriented development (TOD) initiatives and service enhancements
 - Regional land and water trail network, including the Marquette Greenway, American Discovery Trail and prioritized rivers and lakes

- Rural road network planning, ensuring a goods movement network sufficient to support active agricultural uses, processing and distribution



Car show at Westville's Pumpkinfest. Photo by Tom Gill via Flickr.

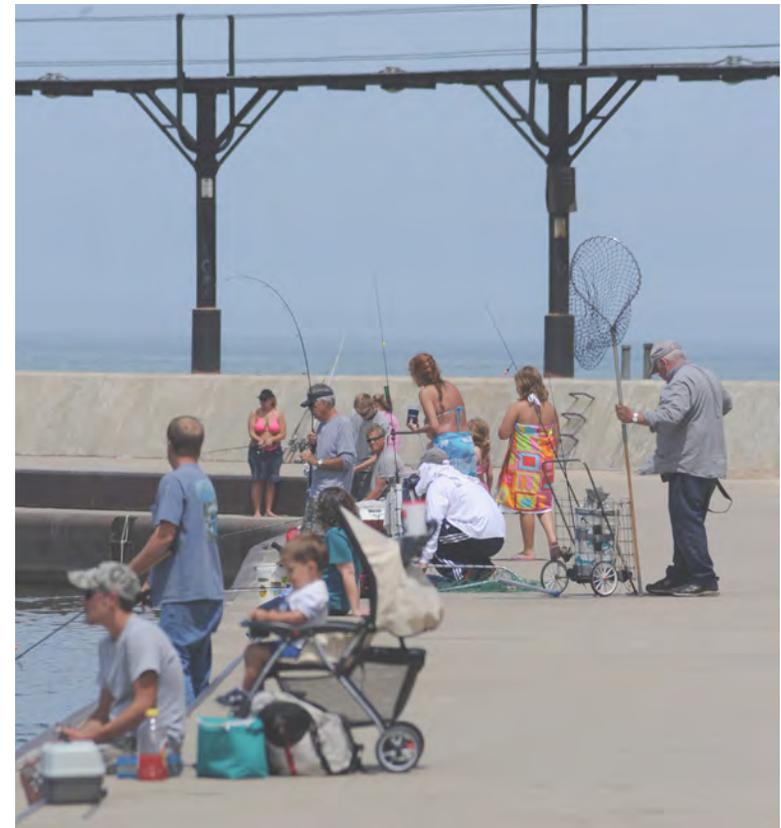
Regional Participation & Environmental Justice

NIRPC actions:

1. Establish a Core Communities Committee to provide technical support and assist in securing resources from federal, philanthropic and other external sources
2. Host an annual regional forum addressing progress in 2040 CRP implementation and issue-oriented roundtables, as appropriate
3. Provide ongoing communication to regional stakeholders on a quarterly basis
4. Build local capacity and understanding of the regional impacts of local planning and promote “best practices” among both the general public and elected/appointed officials, as described elsewhere in this Plan
5. Maintain an active and meaningful role in ongoing regional initiatives, including: Quality of Life Council, Quad-State Accord, Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and other initiatives described elsewhere in the CRP
6. Support and facilitate meaningful public participation in planning efforts at all scales, including expanding NIRPC’s online capabilities, as resources allow
7. Consider the benefits and burdens of potential decisions on environmental justice communities

Regional Partnership:

1. Facilitate increased understanding and meaningful discussion of social justice issues, in particular as they relate to the relationship between land use, transportation and environmental planning efforts in the core communities
2. Enhance the public-involvement process, strengthen community-based partnerships



Fishing in Michigan City. Photo by Stephen Sostaric.

Intergovernmental Collaboration

NIRPC actions:

1. Support and facilitate NIRPC's Council of Government role in advocating appropriate state and federal policy changes to support the region's sustainable vision
2. Communicate shared regional priorities to the federal and state agencies:
 - Flexible regional financing options for initiatives that cross municipal and county boundaries
 - State and federal tax policy favorable to achieving Livable Centers and Focused Revitalization
 - Revenue sharing opportunities to better align regional resources with regional needs
3. Review and advise communities in the region as intergovernmental agreements (IGAs) are developed to address various issues of mutual and broader regional benefit



Beachgoers at Portage Lakefront Park. Photo by Stephen Sostaric.

Regional Partnership:

4. Pursue fiscal sustainability initiatives to address local issues of concern, potentially to include:
5. Shared service and utility agreements, coordination and consolidation
6. Shared purchasing agreements
7. NIRPC will continue to support the ongoing planning and revitalization efforts if its regional partners, as appropriate, to include at a minimum:
 - The RDA's four priority initiatives and other economic development efforts
 - NWIEDD's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
 - Regional Bus Authority
 - Jump Start's Regional Entrepreneurial Action Plan (REAP)
 - Quality of Life Council
 - Center for Workforce Development
 - The Northwest Indiana Forum
 - Indiana Economic Development Corp.

